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TWIN CITY LINES

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The Minnesota Streetcar Museum operates the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line in Minneapolis and the Excelsior Streetcar Line in Excelsior. Its mission is to preserve Minnesota's electric railway heritage.

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Rail transit returns to the Central Corridor

-Aaron Isaacs

It has been 61 years since the last streetcar rolled down University Avenue from Minneapolis to St. Paul, ending a slightly longer period of 63 years when they connected the two downtowns. Once again, the Twin Cities' premier transit corridor will have the rail transit it deserves. This special issue of Twin City Lines, with color and additional copies thanks to the support of Metro Transit, will tell the story of how the cities were connected during transit's golden age.

First, the commuter trains

Prior to 1880, the only connection between the cities was a few daily trains of the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, predecessor to the Great Northern. The 1880s brought a development boom. The GN (we'll call it that despite some corporate changes) ramped up to hourly trains all day that left each downtown at 30 minutes past the hour.

Competition appeared in 1881 when the Milwaukee Road opened its Short Line and instituted departures every hour on the hour. On both railroads, long distance trains offered additional service.

GN rival Northern Pacific built its own railroad between the cities in 1886, and tenant Minneapolis & St. Louis added hourly trains that left the downtowns at 15 minutes after the hour. All three lines made the trip downtown to downtown in 30 minutes.

The railroads also served intermediate stations every mile or so. Several of these were linked to residential real estate developments. These were the "Parks"—Merriam



Park, Macalester Park, Desnoyer Park, St. Anthony Park and Prospect Park. All featured curving streets, hills and parks designed for the latest in suburban living, despite being inside the city limits. Elsewhere in the metro, St. Paul Park and St. Louis Park were similar developments served by suburban trains.

Meanwhile, street railroads were in their infancy. Horse cars reached out short distances from the downtowns, to Seven Corners in Minneapolis in 1875 and to Dale and University in St. Paul in 1882. Horse cars were slow, only managing about five miles per hour and it would have taken more than two hours for a trip between the downtowns.

Electric streetcars arrive

All that changed when electric streetcars left the experimental stage and became commercially viable in 1888. Even the crude early models could make 20 mph and that later increased to 30 mph or more. Although they were two separate corporations, the St. Paul City Railway and the Minneapolis Street Railway were both owned by a group headed by Thomas Lowry. Both companies immediately began converting the old horse cars to electricity. This was no small undertaking. The flimsy horsecar tracks had to be completely replaced and overhead wire had to be strung.

Connecting the cities was a high priority, and was accomplished in

Front cover: Streetcars passed in front of the state capitol on what is now Martin Luther King Drive and a vacated portion of Wabasha Street. The Green Line runs behind the capitol.

Inside front cover: Washington Avenue through the U of M campus had a different look in 1948, because of the temporary classroom buildings erected to handle the flood of World War II veterans attending on the GI Bill. The camera is looking east in front of Coffman Union. Bill Olsen photo.

Above: The streetcars of the Interurban and the Como-Harriet lines looped through downtown St. Paul without a layover via Wabasha, 5th Street, Robert and 9th Street. This car is turning from 9th onto Wabasha.

December 1890. The new line was dubbed The Interurban, and followed the same basic route as the new Green Line, differing only on the downtown ends of the line. Both passed through the University of Minnesota campus on Washington Avenue, then followed University Avenue as far as Rice Street. The Green Line truly is the reincarnation of The Interurban.

For the first year the cars transferred crews at the city limits, while the car and passengers continued into the other city. That didn't last long, for in June 1891 Lowry merged them to form Twin City Rapid Transit, Metro Transit's direct ancestor. Because they were governed by separate municipal franchises, MSR and SPCR remained as corporate subsidiaries. Their existence was evident only in the fare structure. Two fares were required to travel between the cities, and fare tokens were minted for the MSR and SPCR, never for TCRT.

When the line opened, there was considerable open land along the line, especially in the Midway. The initial one-way travel time was 50 minutes. The early streetcars had no traffic to fight, no stop lights to wait for and made many fewer stops.

It only took about three years for the electric cars to put the competing short line railroad trains out of business. The streetcars were more frequent, charged a lower fare, stopped closer to where people wanted to go, and were clean—no smoke, soot or hot cinders to singe clothing or get in people's eyes.

In the decades that followed, University Avenue became an economic powerhouse of manufacturing, retail, hospitals, offices, education and entertainment, with plenty of residential development either on the avenue or within a short walk. From a cluster of older buildings next to Dinkytown, the University of Minnesota expanded south to the Mississippi River, and the center of the campus shifted to Washington Avenue. Ford Motor Company built two assembly plants on the line, as did International Harvester. Montgomery Ward opened its department store and

regional distribution center east of Snelling Avenue. There were 11 hospitals along the line. TCRT itself employed several hundred at its Snelling Station and Shops complex at Snelling Avenue.

Add to that the State Capitol, Lexington baseball park, Memorial Stadium, the two downtowns, and connections to 47 other streetcars lines plus some buses and it's easy to see why the Interurban became the busiest line in the system.

East of the U, the double fare for decades suppressed ridership somewhat across the city boundary. That obstacle was finally removed in 1973 by Metro Transit. Within St. Paul, especially east of Snelling Avenue, every passenger getting off was generally replaced by a new passenger getting on. For a transit operator, this is the perfect situation—it was not uncommon for a bus to carry two or three times its capacity in the course of a trip, yet never experience a standing load.

As befitting its role as the showcase service, over the years the Interurban received the newest rolling stock. The first large double truck streetcars were built for it in 1892. Preserved streetcar #1300 in 1908 was part of a larger order specifically for the Interurban. That's also true of preserved PCC streetcar #322, delivered in 1947. Shortly thereafter the Minnesota Highway Department rebuilt University Avenue, then US Highway 12, and installed bull-nosed pedestrian islands from the state capitol to the city limits. The line even had its own reserved right of way in the middle of University between Rice and Dale Streets. It wasn't light rail, but it was the next thing to it.

Although streetcars dominated the corridor until 1953, buses served it starting in 1918. Bus technology was new, and for awhile was unregulated. By the early 1920s two companies were running limited stop buses in direct competition with the streetcars. TCRT responded by buying them out, but kept running them. This was the predecessor to Route 50. Except during World War II, when it was suspended,

the limited stops ran until the early 1970s. They were replaced by the much faster Route 94 on the new I-94. Route 50 brought limited stop service back in 1998, and has now given way to the Green Line.

Thus the Central Corridor has been the only one in the Twin Cities to feature all-day local, limited stop and freeway express service. With the opening of the Green Line, we've come full circle.

The early years

When the Interurban electric line began operating, the 10-mile area between the two downtowns was largely open country. Track on University Avenue in St. Paul from Victoria Street to the Minneapolis city limits was located in a 25-foot wide strip of sodded land in the middle of a wide boulevard. All street crossings were planked. Center poles were used from Grotto Street to the city limits.

A pair of contemporary first hand accounts give a good feel for the new line when it opened.

Street Railway News, 1890

One of the most delightful electric car rides in the whole country is that to be had on the new Inter-Urban Line connecting St. Paul and Minneapolis. The distance from city to city is about ten miles, but since the opening of the line, residence building has progressed rapidly on both sides of the handsome street, in the center of which the tracks are laid, with the trolley wires hung from the cross arms of center poles. These poles are placed between the tracks, leaving a safe distance between them and the body of the car, and as pole after pole stretches out along a hill top, down its side and away across a level stretch, the perspective is pleasing and the whole presents a most attractive picture. In both cities the line starts from business centers, and by an admirable system of transfers a passenger may take any car in one city and be transferred to the Inter-Urban Line. As a point half way between the two cities is approached, the conductor announces the fact and beyond this point another fare will be collected.

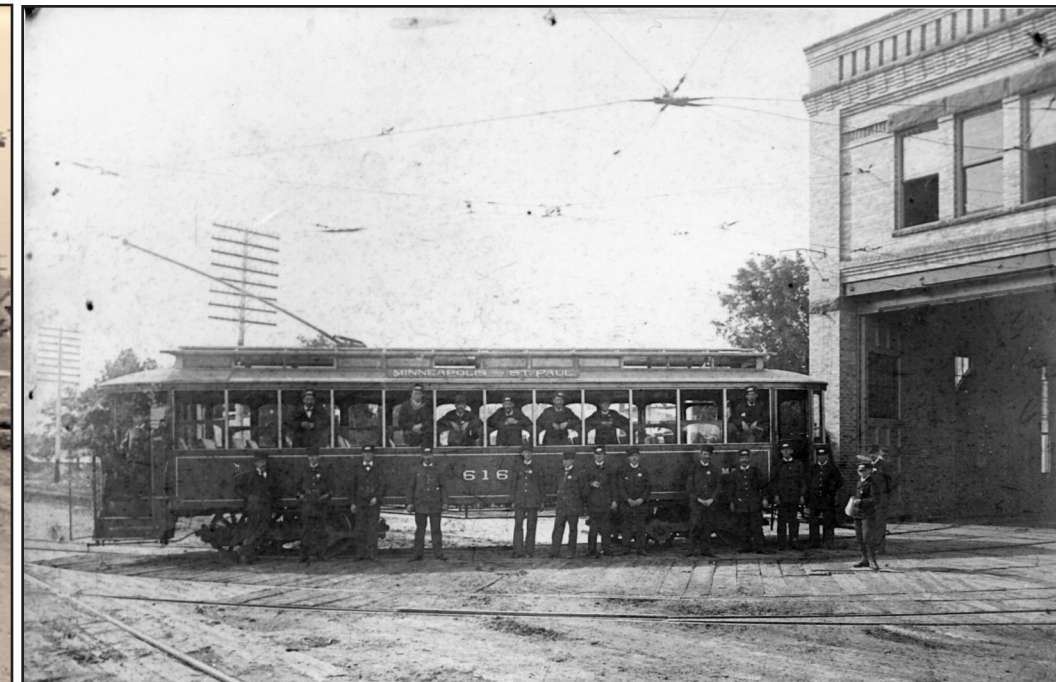
The train crew will then turn it over to another driver and conductor, who set their registers back to zero and commence their run. No time is lost in making this change. Arriving in the other city a transfer is granted to other lines which carry one to any desired locality. By this arrangement a resident of one city may take a car at his own door and ride to any part of the other city for ten cents. Cars run on ten minute headway and the twelve miles is made in from 40 to 45 minutes. Trains consist of two cars each, at present one open and one closed. Under the Minneapolis system all open cars are guarded with a woven wire guard which extends the entire length of the car on both sides, the passengers entering from the rear platform and reaching their seats through a center aisle. All cars are likewise gated on both front and rear platforms on the side next to the other track. The traffic on the Inter-Urban has been truly wonderful, the cars averaging 50 passengers each way during the entire day.

The line crosses the Mississippi in Minneapolis, on a high, steel arch bridge, over which the cars run at full speed, and the remainder of the trip is a charming variety of gently rising hills, from the top of which may be had fine views of the surrounding country for miles around.

The system of crossing steam railroad lines is admirable, there being but one grade crossing and that an unimportant one. The steam tracks in Minneapolis are crossed by passing under them (at Washington and Chicago), and the large number of tracks which are met before reaching St. Paul (the Minnesota Transfer), are passed by means of a magnificent viaduct over which the electric cars are run. To avoid using center poles on this viaduct, which is quite a long one, the wires are suspended by 4 inch gas pipe joined as shown herewith, and springing from the dividing fence which separates the foot passageway from the road. The center of this arch is fully 30 feet above the rails, and the whole is a very substantial construction. There are no severe grades on the Inter-Urban, but several long ones—however, the time made in climbing them is excellent, and there seemed no difficulty in securing full speed in going two or three cars lengths after stopping for passengers



Early days on the Interurban: Above left: In 1899 streetcars meet in front of the new state capitol, still under construction. Minnesota Historical Society collection. Above right: The overhead wire was originally supported by iron poles in the middle of the street. This is looking east at Raymond Avenue about 1910. Below left: In 1914 University Avenue was still unpaved. Looking west from Chatsworth, Lexington Ballpark and Brown & Bigelow are visible. Below right: From 1891 until 1908, the Interurban was based at Midway Station, a carhouse located just east of Raymond Avenue. The building is still standing.



at the steepest points.

Minneapolis Tribune Dec. 10, 1890
**OLD SCENES RECALLED ALONG
THE INTER-URBAN CONNECTION**

The accompanying log of a first round trip is given for the information of the public. The bell sounded the start on Hennepin Avenue at 11:45 today, with 18 able-bodied passengers on board. The car switched away from the main line at 15th Avenue S. (Seven Corners) and then whirled across the Washington Avenue bridge, with the Bohemian Flats and Heinrich's Brewery serving as right and

left supports, but the general view up and down the river is fine even in winter. The bluff on the bank was no impediment to motion and in a few moments the slightly hills of Prospect Park were passed and the conductor cried out "St. Paul." The enterprise and high expectations of its people were readily discerned in graded streets, lamp posts and mounted patrolmen, with rabbit warrens, woods and wheat fields between them and the business center. The little motor whisked briskly by huge signs bearing the words "Fair Grounds", "Experimental Farm", and the

Interurban timeline.

-December 9, 1890: the first Interurban electric streetcar line began service from the High Street loop in downtown Minneapolis via Washington Avenue S., Washington Avenue SE, University Avenue SE to the city limits at Emerald Street, continuing into St. Paul on University Avenue to Wabasha Street and into downtown via a loop on Wabasha, 8th St., Robert and 5th Street.

-August 1, 1891: US mail service began.

-July 1894: Via Washington, Hennepin, 6th Street, 1st Avenue S., then Washington Avenue, rest of route unchanged.

-May 9, 1906: Via Washington, 1st Avenue N., 5th Street, 2nd Avenue S., Washington Avenue, rest of route unchanged.

May 26, 1907: Operation of the Interurban transferred to Snelling Station.

-May 2, 1910: From wye at 1st Avenue N. and 6th Street, via 6th Street, 2nd Avenue S., Washington.

-February 9, 1914: From wye at 5th Avenue N. and 5th Street via 5th Street, 2nd Avenue S., Washington.

-November 4, 1918: Through routed with 6th Avenue N. line, then thru downtown via 6th Avenue N., 5th St., 2nd Avenue S., Washington.

October 18, 1920: From wye at 5th Avenue N. and 5th Street via 5th Street, 5th Avenue S., Washington.

-September 1, 1921: Temporary downtown St. Paul route via Wabasha, 5th Street, to wye at Sibley, return same route.

-October 30, 1921: St. Paul loop via Wabasha, 5th, Robert, 8th, Wabasha

-July 11, 1923: 5th Street bridge construction, all cars shortlined at 3rd Ave. N.

-March 1, 1924: 5th Street bridge completed. back to 5th Avenue N. wye and 6th Avenue N. through route.

-1931: Loop between Robert and Wabasha moved from 8th Street to 9th Street.

-1933: Transporting of closed pouch mail ended.

-November 10, 1934: Began one-man owl service.

-July 15, 1939: Through routing with 6th Avenue N. discontinued.

-December 11, 1946: Began full PCC service using the 1st shipment of 40 PCC cars, numbers 300 through 339 plus 299.

-April 4, 1952: Began extensive one-man service.

-October 31, 1953: St. Paul portion of Interurban line abandoned. Began all one-man service on Minneapolis portion except for six 2-man runs. These 2-man runs were for older conductors too young to retire but too old to become bus drivers.

-November 28, 1953: Interurban streetcar line abandoned except for nonrevenue trips to Snelling Shops in St. Paul until June 1954.



The Green Line follows the Interurban's alignment through downtown Minneapolis on 5th Street. At Hennepin Avenue it passed the West Hotel, gone since 1940. Sweet Studios photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

varied industries represented at the Minnesota Transfer and the stock yards. Comfortable houses dot the route at intervals and the old University Avenue is no longer recognizable. The Baker place, Desnoyer's, the Hopkins farm, and the Larpenteur home, which were sign boards or a refuge for the traveler have been hidden behind new improvements or wholly supplanted. In just 40 minutes after the start the motor was pushing down Wabasha Street in front of the new state

capitol.

Owing to several unavoidable stoppages on the return, the Minneapolis terminus of the line was not reached until 1:45, making just two hours for the round trip. When the new motors are in operation-say the first of the new year-round trips will be made in 50 minutes.

The first Interurban cars were 24-foot single truck open motor cars built by the Laclede Car Company in 1890. In early 1892, the first double truck car

to operate in the Twin Cities was tested on the Interurban line. Built by the Northern Car Company of Robbinsdale, the 35-foot 40-passenger closed motorcar with a railroad roof was rated a success and subsequently used in regular service.

By 1914 headway was 4 minutes all day with 2 minute headway during rush hours.

As mentioned earlier, the Interurban killed the competing commuter trains. It happened over a couple of years, as recounted in this excerpt from an April 1891 Street Railway magazine published in St. Paul.

Slowly but surely the Interurban electric cars have been undermining the passenger traffic of the short line railroads between Minneapolis and St. Paul. The number of passengers carried by the short line trains has fallen off 50% since the Interurban cars were started. The Milwaukee Road has been the greatest sufferer. The Interurban enters into more direct competition with that line than with the Great Northern, as both the Milwaukee Road and the Interurban reach Merriam Park and the more thickly settled portions of the Midway district. The Great Northern still has traffic to and from St. Anthony Park, Hamline, and Como. Shortly after the Interurban line started, the Milwaukee Road took off the ticket collectors on the short line trains. The volume of business had so decreased that they were no longer needed. Now it is proposed to reduce train service. Those trains which leave both St. Paul and Minneapolis at 7 and 9 AM and 3, 8 and 10 PM, will be discontinued. The Milwaukee has several through trains which will handle part of the business formally allocated to the short lines. There will be a train leaving the Minneapolis at 3 PM and at 7 AM and one leaving St. Paul for Minneapolis at 3 PM. The time of other through trains will be changed slightly so as to partially supply the loss of the short line trains.

It is understood that for some time the Milwaukee Road has contemplated a reduction in the fare to \$.25 or \$.30 for round-trip between the cities (the streetcar round trip was \$.20), and the putting on of twice as many trains, or rather to have the present trains run half hourly instead

of hourly. By reduction of the running time to 20 minutes, which can be done with the powerful engines that have been purchased during the past year, no additional train crews would be needed and the wear and tear on rolling stock would be the only considerable increase of expense. The reduction in price and running of trains half hourly in addition to quickening the time of running, would doubtless greatly increase the popularity of the short line, and would have won back much of its former patronage. This plan was knocked in the head by the agreement with Great Northern, which has not felt the competition of the electric line so severely, and therefore does not wish to make the change. The contemplated reduction of the number of trains will undoubtedly and doubtless prove unsatisfactory and will drive more people than ever to the electric line.

Also a mail carrier

Mail service aboard the Interurban began in August 1891, and 12 cars were equipped with mailboxes similar to the small U. S. Mail street corner boxes. Made of sheet iron they were fastened to the right-hand front side of the car, convenient for passengers as well as persons who want to deposit mail without boarding the cars. Each car was lettered on the side "U. S. Mail". Mailboxes were painted the same color as the streetcars.

The August 2, 1891 Minneapolis Tribune described the service. The final arrangements for starting the interurban mail service between Minneapolis and St. Paul were made yesterday. On Tuesday morning and every morning thereafter the first mail car is at 7:30 a.m. and runs every half hour till 4:10 p.m. A United States flag will be attached to the mail cars to distinguish them.

A messenger will be stationed at First Avenue (Marquette) and Washington, who will unlock the boxes on the arrival of the car, take from it the mail, sending it immediately to the post office for delivery. He will then, after the mail car has gone around the loop, place within the box all mail for St. Paul. In the same manner it is intended that citizens shall deposit their mail for St. Paul, both in the city and at



This telephoto look down Robert Street in St. Paul finds an Interurban about to turn onto 8th Street. Note the South St. Paul bus. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

any point along the line. Herein is one of the advantages gained over the old method (deliver the mail to the downtown post office, which sorted it, postmarked it and placed it on a train), the necessary time required to postmark and distribute at the mailing post office is saved. Add to that the time heretofore required under the old method to haul the mail to and from the depot and you have a net saving of time by the new scheme.

By 1894 all streetcars operating in

Minneapolis and St. Paul were equipped with mailboxes. They were equipped with slots and anyone could drop in a letter. That ended sometime before 1910 when the location of the mailboxes on the standard passenger cars was moved to the rear-most gate post. However, closed pouch service between the downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul post offices continued until 1933.



Home built cars for the Interurban

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, TCRT was building hundreds of its own distinctive 46-foot double truck cars in its own shops at 31st and Nicollet in Minneapolis. These found their way to regular service on the Interurban line. Cars 900-949, built in 1902 and all equipped with air brakes were assigned to the Interurban and Como-Harriet lines.

In 1908, fast cars 1291-1309 including MSM's 1300, were built at the company's new shops at Snelling and University in St. Paul. They were assigned to the Interurban line in order to cut running time.

The Interurban goes west

Beginning in 1914, the Interurban's western terminus was a wye at 5th Avenue N. and 5th Street, across the street from today's Target Field Station. This was also where the 6th Avenue N. line continued west to Russell Avenue. Most TCRT lines didn't end downtown. They were through-routed from one end of the city to the other, thus eliminating duplicate mileage within the downtowns. Periodically, TCRT's schedulmakers would change which lines were paired to reduce total mileage. In 1918 they extended every second Interurban car out 6th Avenue N. to Russell Avenue. This arrangement continued until 1939, a year before 6th Avenue was rebuilt and widened as Olson Highway and the streetcars were removed. Thereafter all Interurbans



Left top: 5th Street at Nicollet Avenue. MHS collection.
Left middle: Turning from 5th Avenue S. onto Washington.
Above: Passing the Minneapolis city hall on 5th Street.
Bottom left and right: The troublesome Washington Avenue viaduct. Minnesota Historical Society collection.



Opposite page

Left top: Looking east on 5th Street at the end of track. The wye is behind the low building. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Left middle: The 5th Street N. terminal with double track wye.

Right top: looking down on 5th Street from 2nd Avenue N. to the end of the line at 5th Avenue N. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Left and right bottom: Looking both ways on 5th Street at Hennepin.

terminated at 5th Avenue N., in what is now the Shapko Printing parking lot.

A crowded track

The Interurban's regularly scheduled cars ran every minute or two during the rush hour and about every 5 minutes the rest of the day. However, in some places they shared the track with other lines, with extra unscheduled cars, and with a variety of non-revenue movements.

By 1921 the line had settled into the downtown routings that would last until the end of service. Downtown routings of other lines changed over the years, but the 1946-47 map on page 22 can be taken as a typical example. In Minneapolis, the Interurban shared 5th Street and 5th Avenue S. with the East 25th Street line. Once it turned onto Washington Avenue S., from 5th Avenue S. to 7 Corners it traversed one



of the system's real bottlenecks, along with the East 25th Street, Minnehaha-Plymouth, and 34th Avenue S.-N. Washington lines. Besides being busy, the street was cursed with the viaduct at Chicago Avenue that carried railroad tracks into the Milwaukee Road depot. It was a low spot that flooded with some frequency, and trucks were forever getting stuck in its low overhead clearance. To make matters worse, there was no alternate route available. When one of these incidents happened, all four lines shut down.

Things got very busy on the St. Paul end of the line as well. At Rice and University the Rice-South St. Paul, Como-Harriet and Hamline-Cherokee lines all ran down Wabasha Street from the capitol. They were joined at 10th Street by the Rondo-Stryker line. Once again, there was no alternative route if something blocked it.



Above: Washington Avenue at 9th Avenue S., with the West Side milling district in the background. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Left: An Interurban curves through 7 Corners. The Fort Snelling, East 25th Street and 34th Avenue S. lines diverge at right. Minnesota Historical Society collection.
Below: The Washington Avenue bridge, with the U of M campus in the distance. Art Rusterholz photo.





Top left: Students at Northrop Mall before crossing the Mississippi. MHS collection.
 Bottom left: Washington at Church Street, before the expansion of the U Hospital.
 Above: Boarding test PCC #299 at Church Street.
 Below: Looking east from the Coffman Unionfootbridge.



Amazingly the Interurban (and the even longer Como-Harriet) didn't take a layover in downtown St. Paul. Both lines made the same continuous loop through downtown via Wabasha Street, 5th Street, Robert Street and 9th Street. Interurban crews made two-hour round trips without a break, with all layover on the Minneapolis end. For Como-Harriet crews it was more like three hours without a break. Both were high frequency lines that must have experienced bad bunching and other reliability problems due to the lack of layover. The only anti-lateness tool available to the starter stationed at 7th and Wabasha was to short turn cars via the small loop on 7th Street, Cedar and 9th Street, avoiding the longer loop through downtown.

Extra cars

The busiest part of the Interurban has always been from downtown Minneapolis to the U of M campus, and TCRT ran plenty of extras to handle the loads, primarily eastbound in the morning and westbound throughout the afternoon. Oddly, there was no

short turn wye or loop near the east end of the campus. The nearest was the wye at Emerald Street, the city limits.

Although Snelling Station provided the Interurban's regular runs and some campus extras, others came from the Minneapolis carhouses. The usual pattern was to double over from a morning rush hour tripper, or, in the afternoon, run a campus trip to downtown, then double over to a rush hour trip on another line.

Lake Street Station morning extras took a particularly circuitous route from the campus back to the station at 21st and East Lake Street. They stayed on the Interurban all the way to Snelling Avenue, cut through the Snelling Station storage yard, then onto southbound Snelling Avenue to Selby, and then the Selby-Lake line back home.

North Side extras turned at Emerald Street and traveled back through the campus. In the afternoon, they often followed Washington Avenue to 2nd Avenue S. to 6th Street, where they immediately became Penn or Fremont cars to north Minneapolis, while



Left: University Avenue SE and the Southeast grain elevators, viewed from the Prospect Park water tower. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Above: Looking east from the city limits wye at Emerald Street.

Below: Looking west from Vandalia Street, with safety islands at every block.





Left: Installing a safety island at Raymond Avenue. Pioneer Press photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection. Above: Passing under the Minnesota Transfer tracks west of Prior Avenue. Below: Until 1935, University Avenue bridged the Minnesota Transfer. Minnesota Historical Society collection.



dropping off the U students.

East Side Station extras used 3rd Street on their return trips into downtown. During World War II TCRT also pressed into service for the peak campus traffic several buses from their 11th and Currie garage near downtown Minneapolis. The buses followed the same route as the streetcars but it was not necessary for the buses to go up the hill to Emerald Street to turn around. They ran around the block near Washington Avenue and Oak Street.

The St. Paul end of the Interurban line also required extras. These were for service to and from the state capitol, the Prom ballroom, St. Paul Saints baseball park at University of Lexington, and for Minnesota Golden Gopher football games at Memorial Stadium on the campus at Washington Avenue and Oak Street.

Non-revenue moves

Each weekday at 4:10 P. M., three streetcars would pull up near the employee door of Snelling Shops and wait for the 4:15 whistle atop TCRT's water tower to blow signaling the end of another work day. Quickly the cars

filled with homebound workers and headed out in different directions. One car went west on University Avenue to downtown Minneapolis. A second car would head east on University to downtown St. Paul. If space permitted, the car picked up passengers as would a normal Interurban car. The cars returned to the shops bearing the University to Snelling sign.

The third worker's special turned south on Snelling Avenue to Selby Avenue, then west on the Selby-Lake route all the way to its Lake and Hennepin terminus in Minneapolis.

Because it was the shortest route to downtown St. Paul, the Interurban was used for all pull-outs and pull-ins to/from downtown, except for the Selby and Grand Avenue lines, which used those streets which they reached via Snelling Avenue. Pullouts to the north end of the Dale Street and Western Avenue lines also used University to Dale and Rice Streets respectively.

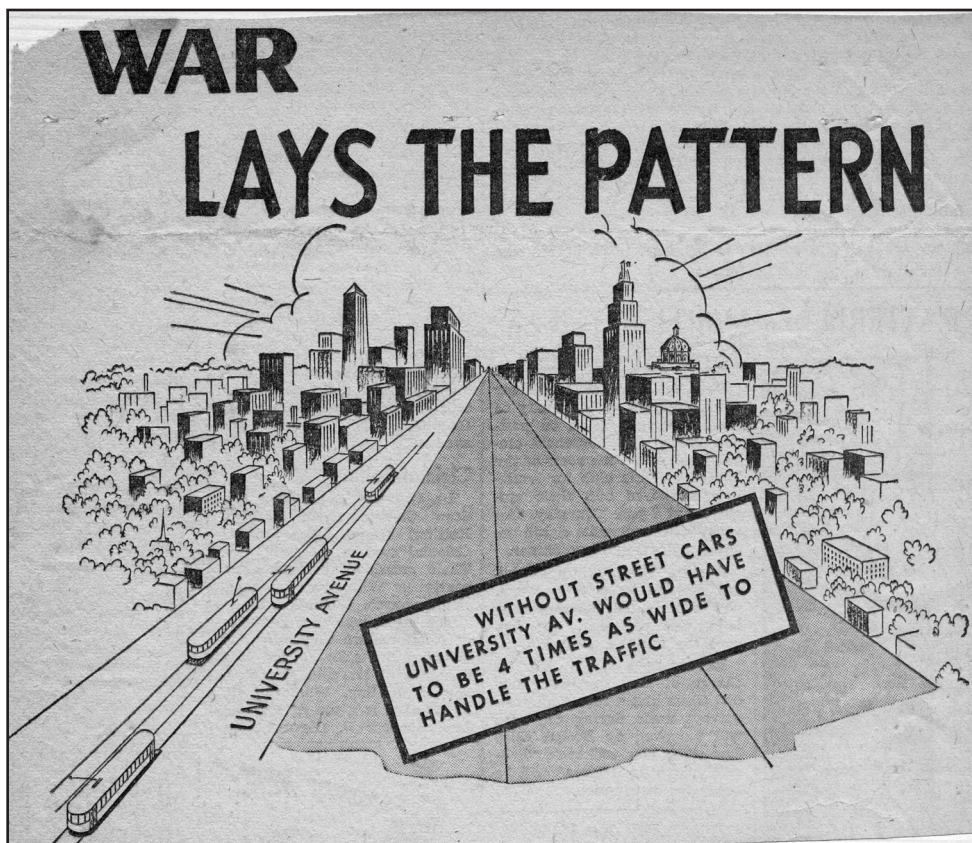
Every day saw shop transfers (cars travelling to and from the shops for repairs) between all the stations and Snelling Shops. The transfers from Duluth, North Side and East Side stations all used the Interurban. Each day the supply car from the Snelling Shops central storehouse traveled to a different station to pick up and deliver parts and materials and three of the five weekly trips were via University Avenue. Work cars made regular runs on the line, especially in the winter, to deliver sand, coal and salt to the stations and the ends of the lines and retrieve ashes. Sand cars and snow plows made frequent winter appearances.

Personal tales: Gene Corbey

During Gene's tenure on the Interurban line in the late 40s, he recalled a couple of interesting events. One slippery Saturday morning, his streetcar was going downhill on University Avenue near Rice Street in St. Paul when a motorist in the 1936 Hudson cut right in front of his streetcar. The driver's rear bumper



**Above: Just east of Fairview Avenue, where University Avenue curves.
Below: Transit did its part to help win World War II, as depicted in this TCRT ad.**



hooked the front truck of the streetcar in such a way that the bumper was launched from his car like from a slingshot and sailed about a block. The embarrassed driver drove on not realizing his bumper had gone in a different direction.

On a Saturday night, Gene was working the bar runs—shuttling the heavy crowds that rode the streetcars to and from the Prom Ballroom and taverns the dotted University Avenue. As the car neared the Minneapolis city limits, Gene hollered the familiar city limits—fare limit. About that time he and most of the passengers noticed an odor aboard the car. On the heater behind the backup control box on the rear platform, a passenger had left a package of fish. The fish and some passengers—got off at the next stop.

Al Johnson

Al Johnson was a motorman at Snelling station from 1946 until the cessation of rail operations in 1954. He frequently worked the Interurban line. Although this service generally was uneventful, Al remembers one incident in particular. He was coming into Snelling Station from Minneapolis after a run on the Interurban one fall Saturday afternoon. The electric switch just past the intersection of Snelling in University had conked out so Al threw the switch by hand.

The front truck took the switch but the rear truck continued east on University towards St. Paul. The old car jackknifed and the rear truck derailed just as a fleet of extras was preparing to head out for Memorial Stadium to pick up a waiting crowd of Minnesota Gopher football fans. The crowd wound up waiting a longer than usual.

Robert Cumbey

Robert Cumbey rode the line during the 1940s and recalled what it was like in an article reprinted from the Minnesota Transportation Museum's Minnegazette magazine. Here are some excerpts.

"I was an almost everyday rider on



The Interurban operated out of Snelling Station, at lower left. From 1908 to 1927, the Snelling Shops complex at right built 870 streetcars. The track and overhead wire departments were located next to Montgomery Wards.

the Interurban line while attending the University of Minnesota in 1943 and again in the years 1946 through 1948. As great as the frequency of my rides on the Interurban were, the length of each ride was quite short. My customary ride was between a transfer

from or to the Minnehaha-Ft. Snelling line at 7 Corners, and Washington Avenue in the heart of the university campus, a distance of about a mile.

Having 8 o'clock classes on the campus, I always rode the Interurban during the height of the morning rush-

hour. The headway between cars was only a minute or two and the cars were loaded to capacity, particularly during the severest winter weather.

During my university years the Interurban line was equipped with both the gate cars and the rebuilt 1-man/2-man cars, although all weekday service was with 2-man cars. Beginning in December 1946, the first of the 300-339 PCC series along with the older 299 PCC car, took over many of the basic runs. The PCC cars also were operated with 2-man crews on the Interurban line.

I remember one particularly stormy winter morning in 1943 when the snow was deep enough to cause the cars to fall behind schedule. Our northbound Minnehaha-Plymouth car arrived at 7 Corners okay but there were throngs of people already on the island between the tracks curving off Cedar Avenue and the Interurban tracks curving around the jog in Washington Avenue toward St. Paul. But there were no eastbound To St. Paul cars in sight. On the other hand I counted 12 westbound to Minneapolis cars going by one right after the other.

The starter at 7 Corners flagged down car 1358 in the lineup headed west to Minneapolis, unloaded his passengers and squeezed them aboard other westbound cars, and then had 1358 back up across 15th Avenue South and head around the lead off the northbound Cedar Avenue track onto the eastbound Interurban line track. The destination signs were changed to University to Snelling and we clambered aboard an empty car for a ride to the campus.

My 8 o'clock class was then college English in Folwell Hall on the opposite side of the campus from Washington Avenue and I was afraid I would be late to class, but my English instructor was also on 1358 with me, so I guess it was all right that morning to be late to class.

I remember another bitter cold winter morning vividly. It was bright and sunny but windy and subzero. The usual throngs of people were on the island at 7 Corners when 1486, another



Snelling & University, viewed from the roof of Snelling Station. The streetcar is running on the Snelling Avenue line.

1953. He was interviewed for the public TV documentary "University Avenue—One Street, 1000 Dreams". Here are some excerpts.

"I'll never forget the run over the Washington Avenue Bridge by the University campus. George Behrens was my driver and I was the conductor in the back. A lady come up and asked me, how come they go so slow over the bridge? And George Behrens heard her say that and he said, lady we do that so we can make peace with the Lord and ask forgiveness of all your troubles before we drop in. That lady was uncomfortable across that bridge. Yeah that was an old, old bridge."

"You'd go into the U of M and the street would just be black with people. You'd open up both the doors and let 'em pile in. Close the doors and have to take off."

gate car, pulled up with To St. Paul signs. The crowds were so heavy I could get up only on the bottom step of the open back platform. The gates closed behind me and we were off.

The cars always moved at a very restricted speed, about 10 mph, across the narrow high Washington Avenue bridge over the Mississippi River. I was still on the bottom step of the back platform we got up to the top of the hill in their 17th Avenue, Southeast. The conductor never did get my transfer that morning."

"As a younger boy in the 1930s, the Interurban line impressed me because it seemed different, not running down tree-lined avenues bordered with homes on either side. The Interurban line was nearly always in a commercial district or an industrial area. The line was hilly, whereas Lake Street in Minneapolis, near my home, was pretty flat. The motors on the Interurban cars would hum with full power on the climb leaving the Mississippi River bridge into the campus and again on the long climb

up University Avenue SE to the St. Paul city limits. Once in St. Paul it was downhill to the triangle just west of Franklin Avenue, then uphill again to Raymond Avenue.

I remember well the long narrow overhead viaduct across the Minnesota Transfer railway tracks between Cleveland and Prior avenues. As a boy the Interurban cars seemed to me to be up so high in the air as they crossed this long viaduct. It was a gradual rise all the way to Dale Street, a drop down to Western Avenue and another climb back up to Rice Street. Then it was down the long wobbly Wabasha grade into downtown St. Paul and finally, turning off Wabasha, down the very steep 5th Street hill, perhaps the steepest grade on the Interurban line."

Merle Seil

Motorman Merle Seils hired on after World War II and ran the very last scheduled streetcar into downtown St. Paul in the Interurban on October 31,



Passing the Prom Ballroom, just west of Lexington Avenue.



"There was a fella – this was in the winter time – not hard core winter because the snow didn't quite pile up yet – but he came down from St. Paul and he tried to pass a streetcar on the left side when one was coming the other way and he got squashed in between the two of him. It killed him, naturally, but it tied up everything for hours and hours".

Above: Looking west on University at Dale Street. Ramsey County Historical Society collection.

Right: Passing the capitol on Wabasha Street, before it was removed as part of expanding the capitol grounds. Below: Approaching Rice Street. Both Pioneer Press photos, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



"There was a big drugstore at the corner of Raymond and University. And we had a inspector – his name was Ralph Ledge, really a swell guy – and he'd be standing up there in the winter time with a big sheepskin on, checking the cars as they went by to see if they were on time, and he'd get so doggone cold out there. He had certain drivers that he liked. And I was one of 'em and he says, laddie, when you come in from St. Paul they'll have a package for me at the drugstore there. Well I said, yeah I'll run in quick and I'll pick it up for ya. So when I went in and picked it up I found out that it was liquor. It was a bottle of liquor. He'd take a snort to keep warm. He didn't have no place to stand inside at that time. So he thanked me real well for it. He never bothered me from that time on, if I was a couple minutes ahead or something. We were buddies."

"There was a St. Paul water truck washing the streets with water on University Avenue and he'd just filled his truck at Prior with water and he made a U-turn on University Avenue

and made a U-turn right in front of the streetcar. And the streetcar hit him. Well, it bent the streetcar to the shape of that water truck in the front. Anyway, the five people sitting in the seats had their teeth knocked out from the hit, from the impact, hit the seats in front of them. I remember that real well."

"When the State Capitol let out it took three or four streetcars in a row to fill up. And that Prom ballroom many, many nights – it depends upon who played there – they had to send out extra cars to pick up the people to take 'em downtown to transfer onto cars that go near their houses."

"Some kids got into the Snelling Station yard and started fooling around with one of the work cars and they started up that work car. It's a good thing it was going real slow. And it went right out by Montgomery Ward – come right out on Albert Street onto University Avenue, real slow. And there happened to be a fella going home from work – he worked the split shift. And he saw that work car come out as he was going home and he didn't see nobody





7th & Wabasha was the center of streetcar operations in downtown St. Paul. A starter was stationed around the clock in that little arch-roofed booth on the sidewalk, where he could supervise ten different lines., including the Interurban.

by the controls. So he put two and two together and looked up again and didn't see nobody. So he sped up down the line a little bit, jumped out of his car, and run after this work car going real slow. He jumped on and went up and stopped it. Then he called...if that would have went down as far as Lexington, that would have picked up speed and it would have went all the way to the Capital. And he stopped that work car and he called up and told them that he stopped a work car out there on University Avenue. So they had to come out and get it back in. But he never...to the day almost that he died, I asked him if he was ever thanked for it. He said, no. Never ever was thanked for it.

"One night I was the second streetcar

but the streetcar ahead of me at University and Rice Street – he started up at Rice Street and he was going at a pretty good clip by the time he hit Marion because it's a little bit downhill there. And there was a car that come down University, there was a bar on the corner. They found out later they came from that bar. He made a turn in front of this streetcar and he hit that car just broadside. And the car on the side tumbled over and it pinched a woman's toes off, cut her toes off as the streetcar hit that car. I'll never forget seeing them toes laying' on the floor of that car."

"One time – this was funny –Oscar Anderson was my driver. And we were late, trying to make up time, leaving Lexington at Dale Street going into St. Paul between Kent Street and Mackubin

there was a dip in the rail. And we had picked up a drunken woman in Minneapolis – she was quite heavyset. And when Oscar hit that dip, he had her pretty well wound up and this lady she bounced on the seat like that. She was passed out already and fell over in the aisle. And Oscar stopped and we couldn't pick her up, she was too heavy. So Oscar said, well there'll be a starter down at 7th and Wabasha. We'll check down there. So she's laying' on the floor there, passed out. We get down there and the starter looks and he says, oh, ten of us ain't gonna pick her up. He says, I'll phone the police station right up at 10th Street. So the police came out and took her to detox then. But Oscar...he's passed on now too, but every day we talked about it. We had a

laugh about it. She didn't hurt herself, that was the main thing."

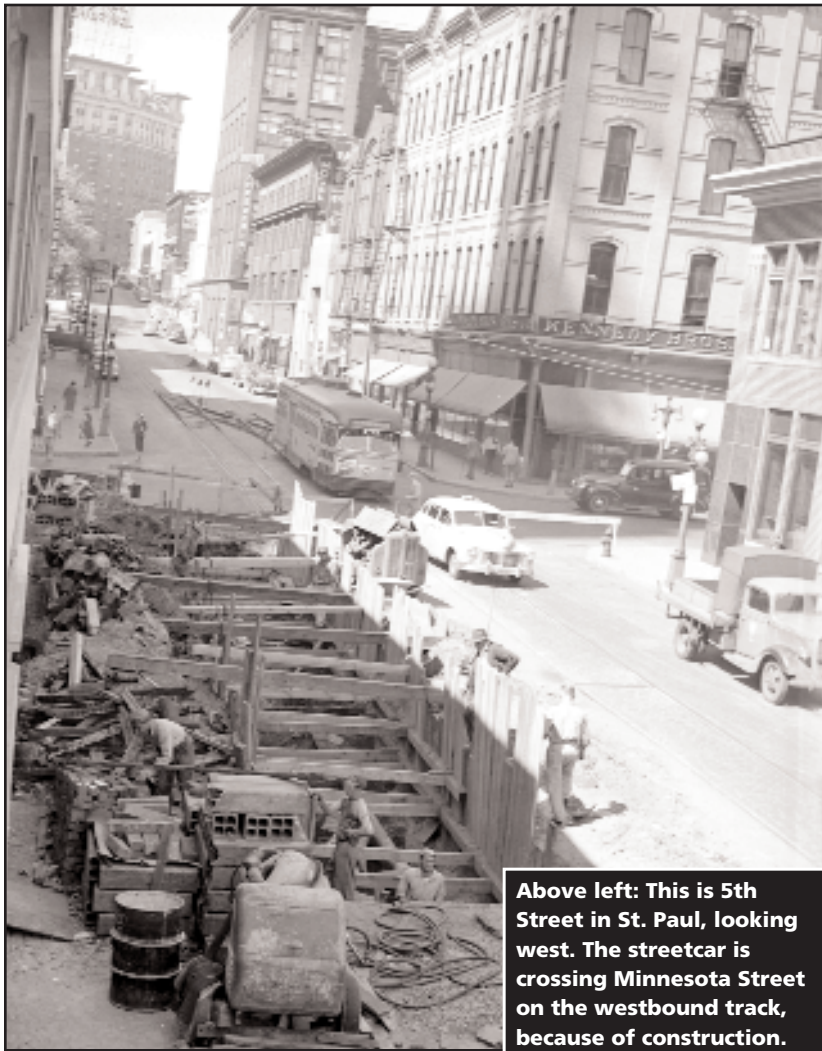
Buses on the Avenue

Perhaps because buses don't have the nostalgic following that streetcars do, we have less documentation and fewer photos of them. We know that competing express buses appeared on University Avenue about 1918. A July 1924 guide published by the Minnesota Motor Bus Association shows round the clock service by Twin City Motor Bus Company with 5-minute frequency from 7 AM to 7 PM. The Brown Bus Line ran 15-minute service all day. We don't know if both followed University Avenue. One might have used Como Avenue. Less than a month later, TCRT purchased a fleet of 40 buses that had been running on University and kept running the competing limited stop bus service, which resembled today's Route 50, just replaced by the Green Line.

On July 1, 1942, the University Avenue buses were discontinued for the duration of the war to free up equipment for service elsewhere. However, in 1943, supplementary PM peak bus service was added between the U of M and downtown Minneapolis during the school year through 1946, and between Snelling Avenue and downtown St. Paul for the rest of the war. After the war ended, the University Avenue expresses resumed service on October 29, 1945. In 1950, Saturday express service was discontinued.

On October 31, 1953, the St. Paul portion of the Interurban was converted to bus. The Minneapolis portion remained streetcar, because the City Council had refused TCRT's request to convert it. Passengers transferred between buses and streetcars at the city limits. The city council approved the change to buses a month later and the rest of the line was converted on November 28, 1953.

On December 14, 1953, the separate University Avenue express line was merged into the local bus schedule. It's described as alternating express trips during the peak hours. Available pocket schedules from 1957-1959 show several



Above left: This is 5th Street in St. Paul, looking west. The streetcar is crossing Minnesota Street on the westbound track, because of construction. Above right: Passing the Emporium department store on Robert Street between 7th and 8th. Below right: In the foreground is a northbound Hamline-Cherokee car on Wabasha. The other car is an Interurban on 9th Street completing the downtown loop. All Pioneer Press photos, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



express trips in each direction each rush hour, but none in the midday.

Effective December 2, 1953, buses were no longer permitted to meet on the rickety Washington Avenue bridge, and had to stay directly on the tracks. On June 16, 1954, the bridge was closed to buses. They were rerouted via Dinkytown and the 3rd Avenue bridge, and later took Hennepin Avenue into and through downtown. This lasted until the opening of the new Washington Avenue bridge in 1965.

Bus routes were assigned numbers in 1957, and the Interurban became Route 16.



Above: About 1918, the Interurban's first bus competitors lined up in front of the St. Paul Public Library for a panoramic portrait.

In 1955, the shuttle bus from Raymond and University to St. Anthony Park was replaced by the rush hour-only 16E branch. Some of these trips reverted to a shuttle in 1958. Many years later the branch was replaced by all-day Route 87.

Buses returned to Washington Avenue and 7 Corners in 1965 when the new Mississippi River bridge opened. Because of the long-term detour, some Prospect Park residents had become accustomed to a one-seat ride to Dinkytown, and a branch of Route 8 East Franklin was extended to Dinkytown to serve that need. The extension lasted a year before being cut back to Oak and Washington due to lack of ridership. Years later, Route 6 was extended from Oak Street to Prospect Park to create a one-seat ride to Dinkytown, but again failed due to low ridership.

The 3rd-4th Street connection to the Washington Avenue bridge opened in 1974. It offered a faster route between downtown Minneapolis and the campus, so Route 16 began using it.

The handful of 16D University Avenue limited stop trips that remained were replaced in 1974 by the new Route 94B express via I-94. That same year the unloved double fare between the cities was finally eliminated, although a 10 cent zone fare was charged for a couple more years.

Limited stop service reappeared in 1998 as Route 50. This included all the

Below: On October 31, 1953, the St. Paul portion of the Interurban was converted to bus, but the Minneapolis city council kept the streetcars running for another month. Passengers had to transfer at the city limits. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

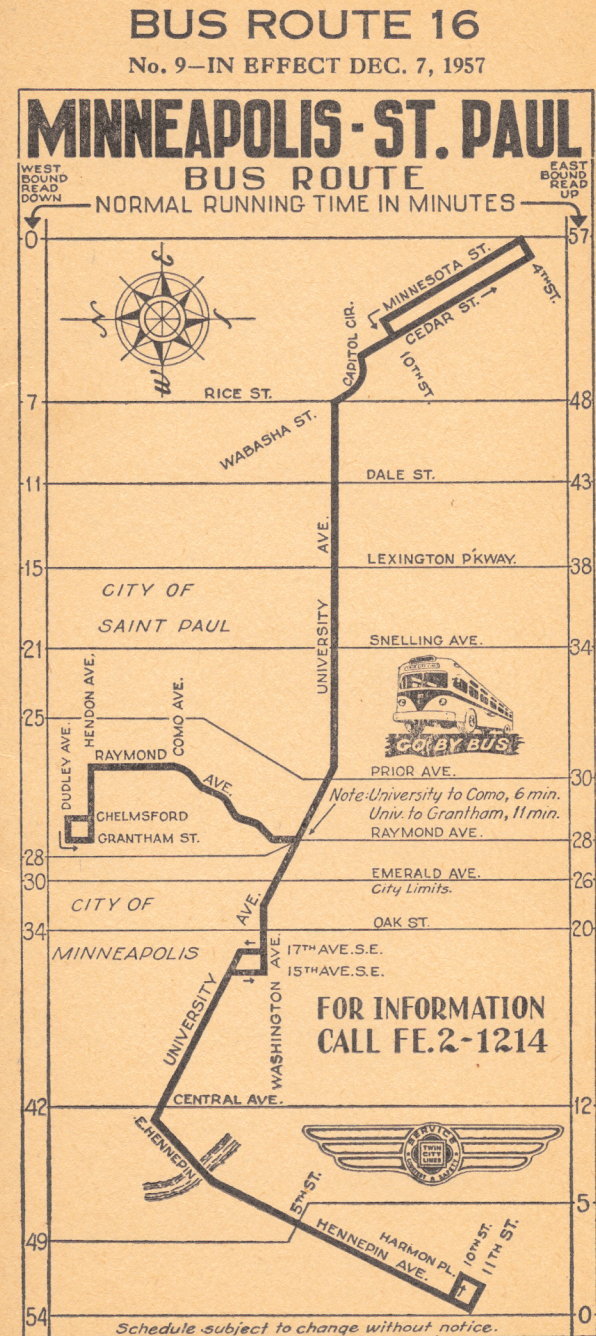


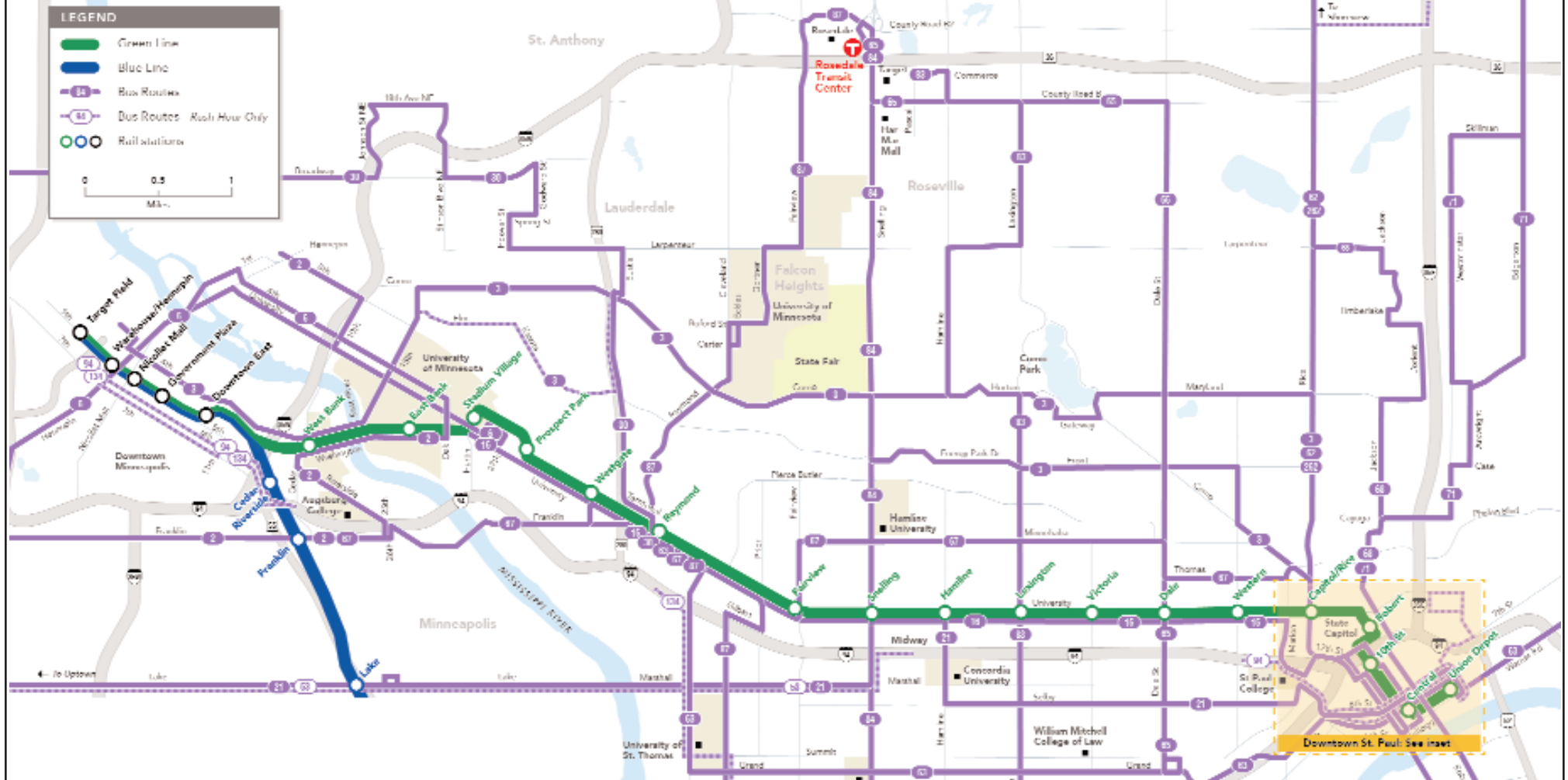


former 16C Minneapolis-U of M campus extras to Oak and Washington. Designating them as Route 50 allowed them to bypass the time-consuming stop at Cedar Avenue.

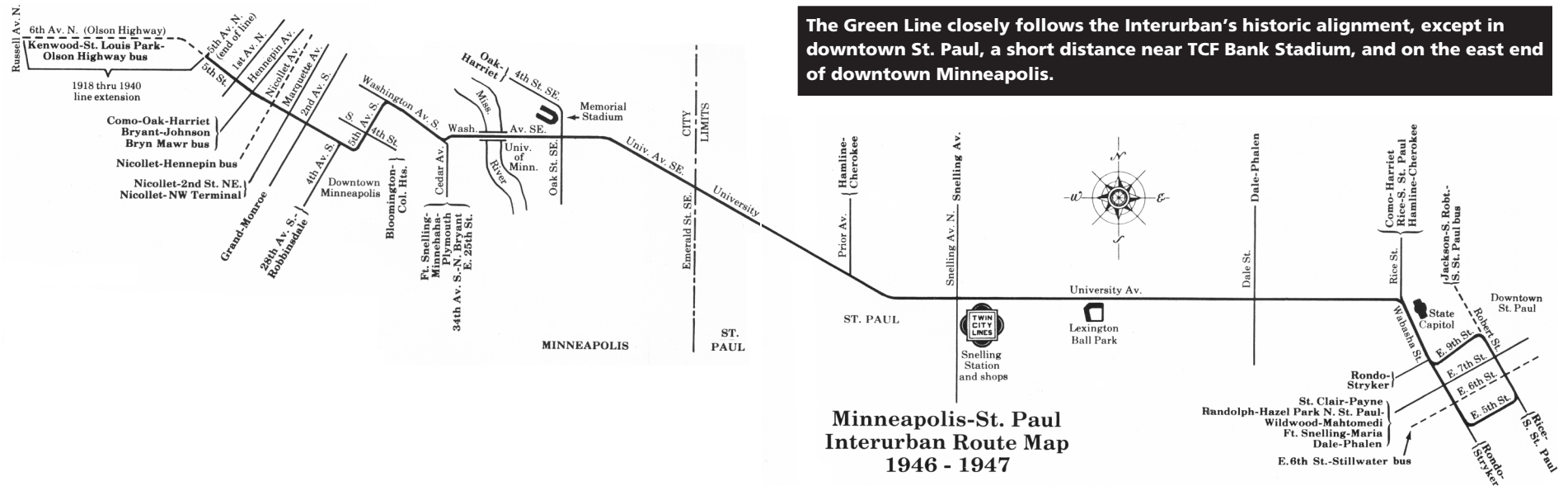
The Green Line replaces Route 50 and Route 16 is shortened, running only from downtown St. Paul to the TCF Stadium Station on the east edge of the campus.

Above left: After buses took over, the safety islands were no longer needed. Minnesota Historical Society collection. Below left and right: The rickety Washington Avenue bridge was closed to buses from 1954 to 1965, when the new bridge opened. Route 16 buses detoured through the campus and via Dinkytown and Hennepin Avenue. Greer Nielsen photo.





The Green Line closely follows the Interurban's historic alignment, except in downtown St. Paul, a short distance near TCF Bank Stadium, and on the east end of downtown Minneapolis.



Rails return to Lowertown

Although the Green Line largely resurrects the Interurban, its easternmost segment revives streetcars on downtown St. Paul's 4th Street from Broadway to Minnesota Street. The first horsecar appeared on 4th Street from Minnesota to Jackson Street in 1872. It was replaced in 1887 by the Selby Avenue cable car line, which ran the length of 4th Street from Broadway to 7 Corners. In fact a cable car yoke (the underground steel structure that supported the cable) was uncovered during light rail construction. The cable line was electrified in 1898 and lasted until 1953. The 4th Street section was used by the Selby-Lake and Grand-Mississippi lines, and by the Dale Street line from 1948 to 1952.

Top: An eastbound Selby-Lake car on 4th Street at Jackson Street.

Bottom: Looking the other way, a westbound car approaches Sibley Street. The St. Paul Union Depot is out of the picture at right. This is the location of the easternmost Green Line station.



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